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PLAIN TRUTH

ON

THE AFFAIRS

OF

1921
= **GRACE CHURCH.**

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TO THE
PEWHOLDERS AND ELECTORS
OF
GRACE CHURCH.

AN election for Vestrymen being about to take place in Grace Church, and there being much excitement and unhappy feeling now existing among its members, it is the duty of every man friendly to its prosperity, to lend his aid to restore peace, to promote harmony, and maintain the cause of justice and truth. With these views the present writer asks your attention to the following observations.

From a very moderate origin, the Church has risen to its present state, principally by the exertions of the men who now compose its Vestry, and manage its affairs. It is well known that it was commenced without funds: and its friends were accordingly obliged, in the first instance, to rely on donations and subscriptions to stock, which, by great exertions on their part, and liberality on the part of the congregation and others, were procured to an extent sufficient to justify the undertaking.

Prosperity has hitherto attended it: a spacious and elegant edifice has been provided: a numerous and respectable congregation assembles for public worship: its appointments are complete: and to all outward appearance, the Church is eminently flourishing.

But it cannot be denied that dissatisfaction reigns within. Enemies to its peace and welfare have sprung up, and sown division among its members.

And how has this happened? From what cause has this discontent arisen? It is much to be feared that the same cause which prompts to action on the larger theatre of worldly politics, is the moving spring here—the love of power, and a restless ambition to rule.

But waving these general remarks, we proceed to something more particular, and propose to notice the most prominent

charges which have been preferred against the present Vestry. Some of these are vague and indefinite: some are specific: none of them true. Without attending to every idle thing which rumour with her hundred tongues is spreading abroad, a few of the most material accusations are here presented.

1st. That the Vestry are not friendly towards the Rector.

2d. That their conduct in relation to the concert was improper, and insulting to the Rector.

3d. That they have squandered and misapplied the funds of the Church.

These three heads embrace all that is necessary to bring to view, in the present communication.

With regard to the first, namely, that the Vestry are not the Rector's friends, it is difficult to know what is meant by this loose and negative accusation. Who was it that invited him to come among us? Who gave him every facility that circumstances required, both officially and privately? The very same men who compose the present Vestry, were among the most active of his friends: were indefatigable in their exertions to promote his welfare; were cordial and foremost, both in word and action, to make every thing pleasant and agreeable to him. They invited him here—they settled him in the Church—fixed his salary—increased it as the income of the Church allowed: and have from his first coming to the present hour, been most anxious to see him happy. And yet these are the men who are said to be unfriendly—these are the men with whom it is said he cannot associate in christian fellowship! But if the friendly feeling once existing between them has been interrupted, let us inquire by what means it has been done. It is an invidious and painful task, and shall be lightly dwelt on: but justice requires something to be said.

It may be safely affirmed, that the coolness which actually exists, did not begin on the part of the Vestry. The heart of the Rector, unquestionably amiable and kind, has been estranged by means of outdoor influence. He has listened to the representations of other persons calling themselves his exclusive friends—his prejudices have been excited—his cordial feelings warped: and suspicion, once roused, received "confirmation strong, from trifles light as air."

One of the means, it is believed, by which the Rector's mind was prejudiced, was the intimation that the Vestry ought to be composed of *pious* persons, or professors of religion, which was not the case with most of the present Vestry. Now in the first place, the nature of the office is such, as not to require its members to be communicants. The Vestry have nothing to do with the spiritual affairs of the Church, but simply with its temporal concerns. They are analogous to the trustees of the Presbyterian Church—and there is no more necessity for their being *professors of religion*, than there is for requiring Bank directors to be professors. Their business is wholly with the funds and external concerns of the Church. And unless we are greatly mistaken, this was the opinion of the Rector himself when he first came among us. He was glad to find the Vestry composed of *business men*, they having the management of the pecuniary affairs of the Church, while his province was the Spiritual.

But in the second place—those who maintained that the Vestry ought to be Communicants, do not adhere to their own creed. Last year they voted unanimously for half the present Vestry, knowing them to be improper persons, that is, not professors of religion. This was done in the hope of carrying in the rest of their ticket, and securing in some way, a majority in the board. And again—this very year their ticket is made up in part of men who are not Communicants. Can any thing more strongly evince the insincerity of their professions?

This is mentioned as one of the means, which, as there is reason to believe, were made use of to bias the mind of the Rector: and he has been led by it, not only to view his old friends with distrust, but to change his own opinion on the subject itself.

We shall only say in addition, on this head, that the Constitution and Canons of the Protestant Episcopal Church, do not require the Vestry to be Communicants: that we are not acquainted with any particular Congregation in which this absurd rule prevails: and that we have been informed, that whenever the subject has been brought before the Episcopal Convention, it has uniformly been rejected, as a principle dangerous, improper, and inexpedient.

To such an extent has the prejudice against the present Vestry been carried, that it has been said that if they, or a majority of them, should be re-elected, the Rector would resign his office.

Let those who believe this, inquire for themselves, whether he has ever given any authority to spread this report. Certainly, he never has done it, if our information be correct. A year ago the same report was raised: nay, it was carried further, and it was insinuated, and perhaps believed by some persons, that the Vestry, if re-elected, would remove the Rector. Now they have no power to do this, as we believe; but the sinister design of the report is evident. What happened? The Congregation thought fit to put in the Vestry again: every thing has gone on well: the Rector remains, where we hope he will long remain: and it is our firm conviction, that if it were not for the out-door influence before hinted at, nobody would ever have heard of heart burning or misunderstanding.

And even now, it cannot be doubted, that whatever unpleasant feeling exists between the Rector and the Vestry, would soon disappear, if they were left to themselves, uninfluenced by other persons. That a mutual good understanding between them ought to exist, is certain; but that honorable and high minded men, anxious to discharge their duty, and of irreproachable integrity, should be sacrificed to groundless jealousy and suspicion, we cannot persuade ourselves is the wish of a Christian Congregation. Is it uncharitable to say, that there was no chance of supplanting the Vestry, unless the Rector were made a party against them; and that it was for this reason that his name has been so freely used, and that their opponents have been denominated his exclusive friends?

It would exceed the moderate bounds which we have prescribed for this appeal, were we to dwell minutely on all the arts and circumstances by which suspicions, once excited, may be fomented and inflamed. With the very best intentions, the purest mind may act with great injustice. And this is particularly true in religious affairs. The best man on earth may be sacrificed without the shadow of justice, if, like the present Vestry he be accused by prejudice, and not allowed an opportunity of being heard in his defence.

We trust that the Pewholders and Voters will not be deceived. We exhort them to ask for proof of any charge against the Vestry. In the absence of all proof, let the accused be judged innocent. Do not suffer mere assertion, slander and inuendo, unsupported by evidence, to have any weight. Do not sacrifice a body of men who have laboured in your cause with admirable energy, perseverance and success, to gratify the wishes of any man or set of men. Be just, and fear not.

And now, in the second place, let us say something about the Concert, which has been a fruitful theme of obloquy.

The Vestry having determined to procure a new Organ, of a size and character suitable to the Church, it was thought proper to give a public Concert at the opening of the instrument. Many examples of this kind had taken place. The principal object of the Concert was to raise funds for the payment of the Organ; and it was supposed that such funds, with the liberal subscriptions which had been made for a new Organ, and the sale of the old one, would nearly pay the whole expense of the instrument. The event has fully justified these expectations.

A Committee was therefore appointed at a meeting of the Vestry, at which the Rector presided, empowered to take all the necessary measures to get up a Concert in good style, and worthy of the occasion. In discussing the matter, it was concluded to employ the best professional talent that could be procured: and among other persons, Miss WATSON, a well known public singer, was thought of. In order, however, to be sure of giving no umbrage either on account of the expense of the performance, or of any other circumstance, the Committee reported to the Vestry what they had done, and among other things, that they thought it expedient to engage the performer just named. The Vestry acquiesced in all the proceedings of the Committee. The Rector was present, and not only made no objection, but pledged himself to support them.

The name of Miss WATSON was advertised in the public papers during several weeks, as engaged to sing at the Concert, and it was as publicly known as any fact of the kind could be. And it was the wish of the Committee to give it extensive circulation, as it would ensure a large audience. Nothing

was said to them against it—no objections were made either in the Vestry, or out of it.

Does any man suppose that the Rector could be ignorant of the profession of the principal singer? Is she not well known in this country as an opera performer? Did not the Rector's friends, as they call themselves, see her name every day in the newspapers, hear it in conversation; and can it be imagined for a moment, if they thought it wrong, that they would not impart it to him? Let common sense and truth give the answer.

We desire to be understood as not impugning the veracity of any person. We have never heard that the Rector professed ignorance of Miss WATSON's being an actress. Whether he knew it or not, there seems to have been no objection on his part, in presence of the Vestry, at any time; nor out of doors, till within a day or two of the time of performance.

A great deal has been said as to the propriety of employing an actress at a public concert of sacred music, given in a church. Many persons say that the profession or calling of such a person, is an insuperable objection. To us it appears perfectly proper to employ the best professional talent in such cases. And as far as the example of other persons, quite as respectable as any of us, will sanction the thing, we are well fortified. In England it is very common—and with respect to our own country, MADAME MALIBRAN, the well known opera singer was employed in Grace Church, New York, some years ago, not merely for once, and at a public concert, on a week day; but on Sundays, as a regular stated performer, in the musical part of divine service. And at the Sacred Concerts given in St. Paul's Church in the same city, MRS. AUSTIN and other performers, actresses and opera singers, have frequently assisted. And who ever questioned its propriety before it was made a handle of, in our church? And are we of Grace Church, in Philadelphia, so eminently holy—is our purity so sublimated, that we cannot tolerate a practice which has obtained every where else? It is true, that the practice of a thing by others does not necessarily show it to be correct, but it serves to show in this case, that very good and pious persons may differ in opinion about the measure in question: and that, to say the least, there is no

necessity for its being so violently condemned. Why is all the blame thrown on the circumstance of an actress being present? Why not find fault with the employment of the instrumental performers, who are attached to theatrical and other public orchestras? Alas, it is much to be regretted, that in religious matters such a sickly delicacy prevails: much to be lamented that a more healthy tone of feeling is not found. The sound judgment, the calm reason, by which many a man is distinguished in his worldly business, seem to desert him when he turns his attention to religion; as if, in the highest possible concerns, his intellectual powers were no longer necessary. He steps at once from the sublime to the ridiculous.

But be this as it may—even if it should be deemed wrong to employ an actress, why should the Vestry be exclusively blamed for it? The Rector never made any objection to it—never opposed it. He went fully and with zeal into the business of the Concert: procured the sale of many tickets himself: acted as a warm friend to the project: attended the rehearsals to the last—and never, in a single instance, as we are informed, made any opposition or remonstrance at the meetings of the Vestry. If he had expressed the least wish that Miss WATSON should not be employed, or that the Concert itself should be given up, the Vestry, out of respect to his feelings, would have complied with his wishes, however contrary to their own. We have good grounds for saying this. But inasmuch as the Rector never said a word to them, that indicated dissatisfaction on his part, how could they know that he was opposed to the Concert, or to any part of its arrangement, or to any one or more of the performers?

The Vestry, then, if blame there be in this matter, are no more to blame than others. There was no opposition at their own board, from the Rector, or from any body else: nor had they the slightest evidence that any part of their arrangements were disapproved, either by him, or by the religious public.

We now proceed to make a few remarks on the unfortunate "Card" which appeared in the papers, and which we call unfortunate merely because it has been so much misunderstood, and has afforded so fine a topic for crimination.

That Card, signed by the Wardens, in noticing the performance, expressed satisfaction at the handsome manner in which the Concert went off, "notwithstanding the illiberal opposition which it met with from an unexpected quarter." Now it seems to be taken for granted, and the opinion has been industriously propagated, that the "quarter" here noticed, was the Rector; and that consequently there was an intention to insult him. Nothing can be further from the truth; for we have shown that the Rector not only did not oppose the Concert, but that he most liberally and zealously concurred in promoting it. The expression therefore was not intended for him, nor is it at all applicable to him. The quarter alluded to, was two newspapers which thought proper to cast censure on the Vestry, combined with the officious exertions of persons belonging to other churches.

It is true, that, though the Rector had attended most of the rehearsals, if not all of them, he absented himself on the night of the performance, much to the regret of many of his friends who were present, and who were then highly gratified with the whole affair, whatever they may say now. And what caused his absence? The answer to this question will explain the "illiberal opposition" mentioned in the Card.

There are some excellent persons, belonging to other churches in this city, who being blessed with supererogatory piety, think it their duty to interfere in the concerns of their neighbors, not enjoying such advantages, and to dispose of their surplus quantum of grace for their benefit. These pious persons, thus benevolently moved, being seized with alarm at the profanation of the sacred temple, by the performance of music for the purpose of raising money, invited our Rector to attend divine service held on the same evening at another church, and engaged him to officiate there. The Rector consented, doubtless with the best motives; but in so doing, unavoidably neglected the previous engagement at his own church. He therefore without saying a word to any body, as far as we can learn; without giving the least notice of his intentions, absented himself: leaving all his friends amazed at his non-appearance, and unable to account for it. Many of those most intimate with him were present—many of those who now de-

claim against the Vestry for this very Concert, and who are now persecuting them, were to be seen there: but nobody could tell where the Rector was. On enquiry at his house, it was ascertained that he had gone to the Church before alluded to; and when the Wardens arrived there, they found him engaged in reading prayers, so that it was impossible for them to speak to him. They therefore left a note for him, respectfully requesting his appearance at Grace Church—but instead of that, he sent a written reply, stating that he could not conscientiously attend. He therefore left the audience, consisting in part of persons to whom he had either sold or presented tickets, to enjoy the Concert without him.

We now ask all candid men whether the Vestry were not justified in expressing their disapprobation of this officious conduct of persons belonging to other churches? What right had these persons to interfere with the arrangements of Grace Church, particularly if such interference was designed to interrupt a settled plan, and to destroy the effect intended? Who is to blame for all the discord which has happened in consequence of this unwarrantable interposition? Is it supposed that our Rector cannot judge for himself as to what is proper in these cases? Does he require to be under the tutelage of others? It was with the conviction that a most improper and censurable intervention had taken place, that the Vestry published their Card, and denounced the "illiberal opposition" which the persons alluded to, had set up. And there was nothing improper in thus rebuking the conduct of people who thus went out of their way to injure others; and who gave their gratuitous advice to the Rector, when they must have known that he was engaged to pursue a different course from that which they marked out for him.

We believe we have stated facts—we certainly do not intend any misrepresentation: and we leave this matter with our readers, abstaining from further comment so far as the Rector is concerned.

But can we say too much against the unwarrantable management of the persons from other Episcopal Churches, who thrust in their advice unasked, and who meddle with our concerns? And what ought to be thought of the impertinent ob-

servations of newspapers, Episcopal and Presbyterian, in relation to this Concert? Does not all this conduct fully justify the Vestry in calling it "an illiberal opposition?" If they were to put up tamely with insult and wrong, without any attempt to defend themselves, they would justly be held in contempt by the very men who are now so inveterate against them.

It were much to be wished that our Rector would take counsel only of his own excellent heart, and clear understanding. Without guile himself, he suspects it not in others; and is consequently liable to be misled by false advice. It is this, which as before stated, has been the source of all the difficulty—the misunderstanding—the want of harmony, which it is said, so unfortunately prevail.

We now dismiss this affair of the Concert. The opposition to it is in truth a very small business—so small, that probably those who started the objections, are very willing to let the whole matter pass into oblivion. And it never would have been revived here, if it were not for the purpose of endeavouring to clear up the misunderstanding in relation to the "Card." Many persons who are now eagerly persecuting the Vestry, lay hold of this Card as the pretext: persons who attended the performance of the music, expressed themselves gratified with it—and many of whom are candid and manly enough to continue their approbation of the Concert itself in all its details. But the Card—the Card, is the unpardonable sin. Admitting for a moment that this little document were in reality as bad as its enemies pretend it is—is that a sufficient reason to displace men who have devoted their time, their energies, their labour and their money for years together, to promote the welfare of the Church? God help them. What will become of their opponents at the great day of account, or even in this world, if this be the measure of justice which is to be dealt out: if for a single fault, admitting it be one, years of honest and laborious merit are to be set aside?

The third charge against the Vestry which it was proposed to notice, is, that they have squandered and misapplied the funds of the Church.

Happily, this charge is so abundantly refuted and exposed by their publication on the financial condition of the church, that it precludes the necessity of a detailed examination of it. Let every voter procure a copy of that publication, which is very short, and read it with attention. He will there perceive that a large and splendid establishment, equal in all respects to any in the city, has been undertaken and finished with complete success. The whole of the debt now against this flourishing Church, begun without funds, is reduced to less than three thousand dollars. This sum is exclusive of the ground rent, which is a mere annual charge, like other expenses. We repeat the recommendation to read the document in question. It has completely destroyed the charge of squandering the funds; and the opponents of the Vestry are glad to let it drop.

When it is considered that this fine and commodious structure was begun with comparatively nothing in the shape of money, and that the Vestry then in power, and their successors, have persevered with unabated energy, to a successful issue: when we recall to mind the unpromising state of affairs, about two years ago: when it is recollected, that such was the pecuniary distress of the Church, that the building was in danger of being sold by the sheriff to pay the liens against it, and that certain of the Rector's exclusive friends said "let it go:" when it is recollected that the Church was saved by the very men who are now the objects of persecution, and that they have for years devoted their minds and bodies, their time, and labour and money to its completion, regardless in many instances of their own private affairs;—when we reflect on all this, let us ask ourselves if it be possible for these same men to be the unworthy persons that their enemies represent them to be. No matter from what source the accusation proceeds, let them have a fair trial. *Fiat justitia*—let justice be done—strict justice, and all these complaints will vanish into thin air.

Should the Vestry fail in their re-election, it will not be the first instance in which merit has been obliged to give way to unfounded clamour. It is an easy thing to stand by, and see others do the labour, and bear the heat and burden of the day; and then skillfully insinuate suspicions against them as unfaith-

ful agents, and undermine them in public opinion. Every body of common observation must have seen examples of this kind. It were to be wished, indeed, that, if human nature must act in this manner, it might be confined to matters strictly of a worldly character; but all experience shows, that the holy temples of religion have their full share of these broils.

A word or two as to the manner of engaging voters to make a change in the Vestry. The moderate men of the Congregation, the doubtful and the indifferent, are assiduously waited on, times without number, and their minds prejudiced, we might say poisoned, with insinuations and charges of which the accused have no knowledge, and to which they consequently cannot reply. Meetings are then held in private houses, to which those who are thus previously warped are invited. Inflammatory speeches and statements are then made, charges exhibited, and much misrepresentation used, to excite the minds of the persons thus invited. No opportunity is given to the objects of this persecution to defend themselves—no evidence in many cases, is exhibited against them: and the honest and unsuspecting audience is thus duped into injustice and error. It is the first principle of justice to give the accused party an opportunity to be heard in his defence. The vilest criminals in our courts of justice have this right; no man can be condemned without evidence to prove his guilt, and being confronted with his accusers, and allowed to speak for himself. But all these just and righteous principles are abandoned by the enemies of the Vestry. Reckless, and intent on destruction, they give no opportunity for justice. They are challenged to the trial. They are called on to name their place and time for a meeting where both parties can be present, where the accused can be heard. If they agree to this, we fear not the result. But if they deny this right—not this privilege, but this right; what will the candid and conscientious of all parties say? Will they uphold a system of persecution like this? Are the enemies of the Vestry afraid of the light—afraid to assemble where both sides can be heard? If not, let then appoint a day for the purpose, and then it will be seen whether conscious integrity cannot sustain itself.

But let us draw these painful observations to a close. They have been made from a sincere desire to do justice to a calumniated body of men, and in the hope of dispelling any prejudices that might exist among the Congregation. If, to build up a church from nothing: to emerge from obscurity to splendor: to increase from a mere handful to a numerous assembly: to gain a high standing among our sister churches: to bestow unwearied pains and labor in the cause: to provide funds for the extinction of a large debt: to invite among us and settle our present Rector: if these, or any of them, be works worthy of censure, let the present Vestry be dismissed with disgrace. But if, on the contrary, these things be thought laudable, and if you have no proof of any improper conduct on their part, you are called upon in mere justice to support the men who have hitherto so faithfully managed the affairs of the Church.

March, 1836.